

Chapter X

IDEAS AND THEIR BEHAVIOUR

(continued)

WE must not think of apperception masses as quiet, contented little communities of ideas independent of each other, and waiting for us to call them up at will. Ideas are not clustered in groups of a kind, but mixed up with the general population of our mental world, as Liberals and Conservatives and Socialists are, in our political world, always rubbing up against each other and very actively influencing each other. And, far from waiting to be called up, ideas are very apt to intrude themselves when not wanted, as we know when we want to go to sleep and cannot. James asks: 'Why do you provide yourselves with light literature for a railway journey? Because you know that without it your mind would be a mere medley of ideas, romping in and out of consciousness without much apparent connection between them.' On these occasions we treat our minds as we would treat children: to keep them from being a nuisance we give them something definite to do. The magazine or the newspaper answers the purpose.

299. So you see that ideas have a sort of activity of their own, and this is called *Presentative Activity*. Every time an idea appears in consciousness it increases its chances of appearing again; its presentative activity is strengthened.

300. We all know what it is to be haunted by

a tune—not always a tune in which we are interested for its own sake, but one to which we have been compelled to listen frequently; one which the London organ-grinder inflicts upon us on his regular weekly round, or an examination piece which several of our pupils are preparing. We may hate the tune, yet its presentative activity is so great that we find ourselves humming it.

301. Now, in teaching, there are always certain ideas connected with our subject which we want specially to keep within call, ideas on which we depend for the assimilation of other ideas, to which we can refer with the assurance that the reference will be understood, and that light will be thrown on the topic we are seeking to expound. We want such ideas to have a strong presentative activity.

302. In all our teaching about pitch relations we are greatly helped if the pupil has vivid mental images of three things, the Keyboard, the Staff, and the Modulator. We need all three, in their inter-relation, to make quite clear the subject of pitch in its twofold aspect, relative and absolute. If they are to be of use they must be *kept in use*, with constant reference from one to the other; and if the pupil can picture them vividly it saves us from being dependent on the actual presence of the objects themselves for a casual reference.

303. So also in the teaching of time and rhythm the fundamental ideas of Pulse, Accent, and Measure, of Pulse-progression and of Cadence, must be kept alive if we would guard against a

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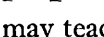
wild and meaningless rubato and the sentimental exaggeration which turns pathos into bathos.

304. 'An idea's first visit to the dome seldom lasts very long.' It is comforting to know that if an idea we have introduced to-day is forgotten by to-morrow it is only what we may expect; but we must see to it that the visit is repeated until the visitor is at home there, part of a growing apperception mass.

305. I have said in another place (3) that the success of future music lessons depends largely on the amount of nursery music that is stored up in the child's memory. In the light of the doctrine of apperception my readers will see the truth of that. Nursery music is no mere rubbish heap. It is raw material certainly, but raw material stored up in the retentive little brain for use years later, in apperceptive processes, if the teacher knows how to use it. If the home has not supplied the raw material, the kindergarten must do it; and if the child's first school has not provided the necessary rote-singing, then the pianoforte teacher has not only to make the bricks but to gather the straw. For 'material must be acquired, somehow, somewhere, before the higher processes can take place.'

306. When the children are at the stage of singing by rote we should look forward to the time when we shall begin to teach them to sing by note, to know the scale-sounds in their relations to each other, to take leaps from one to another, and to recognize those leaps—which we call intervals—when heard. With this new stage

approaching, it is as well to teach the youngsters songs that will 'come in' aptly for illustration when the time arrives—as we women often buy a piece of stuff that we do not immediately need, because we see that it will 'come in' for a special purpose later on. The 'Blue Bells of Scotland' supplies an example of the leap from *soh* to upper *doh'* (s d'), and also of the rather difficult leap from upper *doh'* to *me* (d' m). 'Annie Laurie and 'John Peel' give us the octave *doh doh'* (d d'), and so on.

307. In time-teaching, too, we want examples. Some day we shall be teaching the pulse-group  and its rhythmic effect; so, in advance we may teach by rote songs with the rhythm  such as 'Hearts of Oak' or 'Charlie is my darling.' Some day we shall be introducing Compound time, which (notationally) is much more difficult to apprehend than Simple time. We shall be very much helped if among the pupil's apperception masses we find 'Here we come gathering Nuts and May' or the still earlier 'Little Bo-Peep.' We are told that the elements of what we want to teach 'should lie ready long before they are wanted.' In fact, 'the farther back we can begin the preparation the better.' The meaning and value of a lesson are seen more quickly and clearly when the particular detail we are treating of, be it a pulse-group or a scale-sound, is recognized as an old friend, long known in some familiar tune. In the lesson we single it out for special attention, show it in new relationships, and fit it

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with a notational dress. These new ideas are readily seized when there are apperceiving groups of known tunes ready for us to use in illustration.

308. There is another thing about apperception masses which has much significance for us. Keeping to the analogy with society we may say that, as a person may belong to several 'sets' or 'cliques,' so an idea may belong to more than one apperception mass; and herein lies danger for the teacher. For a word which the pupil does not understand, or does not hear distinctly, may, by reminding him of a word somewhat like it, call up a wrong apperception mass, set him off on a wrong track, and cause him to *mis*-understand. What are known as schoolboy's 'howlers' are mostly due to this kind of misunderstanding.

309. Now, children do not deliberately give wrong answers, so no wrong answer should be lightly passed over. A wrong answer is, in fact, only a symptom, and should be diagnosed as such. The teacher should ask herself: 'Why did the child say (or, in music teaching, why did the child *do*) something so different from what I expected?' The cause is usually discoverable; it may prove to be a fault or an oversight in one's own teaching.

310. The word not understood, or misunderstood, or imperfectly heard, is frequently the first cause of the wrong answer. But it will not be the sole cause. There will generally be other elements, and we should look for these.

311. In examining the 'howlers' published from time to time in educational papers we find, I think, indications that the subject on which the

pupil was being examined was rather over his head. Ideas had been presented to him for which he had no apperception masses ready. This is perhaps inevitable when children are taught in very large classes, and have home experiences of very different kinds, but the imperfectly caught word is more often the cause of the mistake. The examiner asks, 'What is a blizzard?' The answer he gets is, 'The inside of a fowl.' The cause of the Peasants' Revolt is stated to be 'Because a shilling poultice was put upon everybody over sixteen.'

312. An inattentive child may wake up to the last word of a question; and this, if it belongs to more than one apperception mass, will call up the one that has the most immediate interest for him. 'What became of Nineveh, Willie?' 'It was destroyed.' 'And what became of Tyre, Johnnie? Johnnie, you're not listening—what became of *Tyre*?' 'Punctured,' says Johnnie, taken by surprise.

313. One would like to know from what schools some answers come. They seem to have a local connection. 'Lord Rayleigh was the first to see the invisible Armada' might be the output of an Essex school, where the local and contemporary apperception mass that included Lord Rayleigh would have a better chance of recall than the historical one in which Sir Walter Raleigh had his place.

314. In answers given by one's own pupils it is much easier to account for wrong connections, for we have some knowledge of their mental content and also of their environment.

315. Sometimes we can trace a fault to lack of a clear mental image. A boy rattles off, 'A parallelogram is a figure composed of four parallel straight lines.' It sounds quite nice, but he evidently does not see mentally the figure he is describing. How should a teacher deal with a mistake like this? If, without any remark, she turns to the blackboard and begins to draw a figure according to this definition, with the third line the boy will see his error.

316. The same kind of thing may occur in a music class if we ask for a definition. Instead of correcting such an answer verbally, it is better to write it on the board and ask, 'Is it right?' The class, between them, will usually correct it satisfactorily, teaching each other and clarifying their own ideas.

317. In dealing with written exercises, too, it is better not to correct, but to mark the place where there is an error and let the pupil find out what the error is. If he cannot do this without help, go over the work with him, but pupils rarely look at the corrections made in private by the teacher. This is by the way.

318. Misunderstanding and muddle often arise from the subject being unsuitable for the pupil's stage of development. In the *Musical Herald* some time ago there appeared some extracts from an examiner's notebook which are rather illuminating. The contributor says:

'I select some answers which may perhaps afford entertainment, *not unmixed with instruction*, to teachers of musical history. I may say that all the competitors belonged

to what are ordinarily described as the educated classes (girls in secondary schools), and were, as a rule, over fourteen years of age.'

The answers are certainly amusing—I quote some below—but they prove beyond doubt that the course of musical history on which the questions were set had been inflicted on pupils who had not the wherewithal for its assimilation. A lecture, excellent in itself and pronounced delightful by the head mistress and staff, may produce utter confusion in the minds of the pupils, because the lecturer, when preparing it, did not imagine himself in the place of the young hearers and make a rough estimate of their apperception masses.

319. Here are a few gems, and we can sometimes make a very good guess at what the lecturer *did* say.

'Palestrina's music is very monotonous and holy; when listened to it makes a man soar above all the evil and dark spots in his character.'

The next competitor differs. She says:

'Palestrina's music is very long and tedious; although it is real good music, it would not be thought much of now.'

'Bach's preludes and fugues are not things you would like to play at a concert, but were more for exercises.'

'Bach's smooth-tempered preludes and fugues were written in French first, and they were translated afterwards.'

'Bach's preludes and fugues are very clever, and if one wants clever work they might suit, but music that sounds well is preferred.'

One girl, however, finds the preludes and fugues—

'Very pretty; almost too pretty for exercises.'

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‘Beethoven’s music is full of accidentals, and if not played with largeness does not sound well.’

‘The older composers were mainly inveterate thieves, but Beethoven wrote most of his music himself.’

‘Beethoven was not very great at religious composition, though he harmonized the *Messiah*, introducing into it a few new melodies.’

‘Purcell was the only English composer there ever was.’

‘Composers such as Handel and Bach knew next to nothing about chords and keys.’

‘Berlioz was the tutor of Handel.’

‘A fugue takes about three hours to compose, but Bach took longer over his.’

‘Gregorian Music is very weird; it ends in little wails high up in the treble.’

‘Mozart wrote most of his compositions in the train.’

‘The folk-song of the Highlands is Mixolydian; that of the Lowlands Dioclesian.’

‘Handel borrowed some few traits from Chopin, the first great violinist.’

‘Mozart’s operas were smooth, while Weber’s were all large chords which only he himself could stretch.’

320. The examiner who sent those extracts to the *Herald* did not do so merely to amuse its readers. He tells us so. He does not point a moral, but invites teachers to think it out.

321. Those pupils were not stupid young people. The answers do not indicate stupidity, but only muddle. The girls had evidently taken some pains, and they were presumably of the average intelligence of girls ‘over fourteen, belonging to the educated classes.’ The lessons given in the various schools had probably been prepared with care. They had also been illustrated, for the girls had apparently *heard* the music, and no doubt they had applauded every item, which would be

taken as a proof that they had appreciated it—a very common mistake this. No doubt, too, there were many good answers unrecorded. But allowing for that probability there was a distressing percentage of bad ones, for I have not quoted a quarter of those printed.

322. What was wrong? First, I think, that the teachers were so absorbed in their subjects and their treatment of it (5) that they never thought about the pupil's apperceptive ideas. Secondly, that the years up to fourteen, during which those apperception masses should have been built up, had not been so employed. Music teachers do not always think of teaching as mind-building.

323. The History of Music is hardly a school subject. The whole school period is rather a preparation time for a future course in it; and, that it may be such a preparation, no opportunity should be lost for bringing the composer's personality into the music lesson. Beethoven should be something more than a name to the children who play those two sonatinas that every child learns. A biographical sketch is not necessary. Where he was born, or lived, or died does not matter very much, and dates convey nothing to children. 'Whens' and 'wheres' are very vague notions to them. It is the man himself that matters. Lest they should measure him by the sonatinas, give them an idea of how great he was. Show them the photograph too. And when they say, as no doubt they will, 'He looks awfully cross!' try to awaken their sympathy for his deafness. Appeal to their imagination. Speak of the *loneliness*

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of the stone-deaf man, and show he would long for the sounds he loved and could never hear.*

324. If the piece the pupil is learning is by a living composer, let him realize that too. If you can point to the composer's name and say, 'I know that man,' the interested but half-incredulous look on a child's face shows that he has not thought of composers as flesh and blood people, if, indeed, he thought about them at all.

325. If you would have an example of how to talk to children about pieces and composers, get Ridley Prentice's 'Musician,' Grade I. It is teaching of that kind that builds up the apperception masses necessary for that appreciative listening to music which we are working for.

326. If the presentative activity of an idea is to be strengthened by calling it up frequently into consciousness, it is evident, that repetition is necessary in teaching. Yet nothing has been more deadening in school work than the false idea of what repetition means. The old style of teaching was altogether verbal repetition and drill. It was very often barren teaching, for we were not taught to observe for ourselves, to discover relations, to reason, but only to repeat a ready-made formula without any proof that it was understood. In the rebound from that the modern teacher is apt to rush into the other extreme, to neglect repetition and drill altogether, and to be afraid of a formula.

* For older pupils a concise history of music should be at hand for reference. Looking up the composer whose music they are playing is one way of providing apperceptive ideas for a systematic course later on.

327. The multiplication table was perhaps, in the past, the formula most often memorized without understanding, illustrating the saying that 'it is possible for a pupil to know a statement and not to know the fact stated.' By the mere mechanical memory of the multiplication table a child can make 144 true statements without really *knowing* the truth contained in any one of them; 3 times 8 is followed automatically by 24, and the child who has learnt the tables in this way is often quite a reliable little automaton. But suppose the mechanical memory should fail. Suppose that one day after 3 times 8 comes — a blank. The child has no means of setting himself right, except by beginning at 3 times 1 and pattering the table through, a device that is often successful. The child who, under modern teaching, has 'built up' his multiplication table out of his knowledge of the powers of single numbers is not thus helpless when his memory fails. If he knows, through working with concrete material, that twelve twos, two twelves, six fours or four sixes, eight threes or three eights, will make 24, then '3 times 8' is a reminder of a familiar and understood process on which he can fall back.

328. But the modern teacher who taboos drill is apt to forget that the mechanical memory induced by frequent repetition is also necessary if the child is to be a rapid worker, for the tables should be 'on the tip of his tongue.' The mechanical drill should come *after* the understanding is clear; this is all.

329. In like manner the child who merely

memorizes the number of sharps and flats in the key-signatures may at any time forget, and has no means of restoring lost links; but the child who has 'built' his scales on the keyboard (with the modulator at the back of his mind) knows *why* a certain scale has so many sharps or flats. He cannot forget, because he has only to fall back upon a familiar process.

330. The repetition of a mental process, like the repetition of a physical process, tends to make the process easier and more rapid, and a formula as a framework for the process will tend to make it not only more rapid but more accurate. For instance, in the *First Scale Course* ('Guide,' *Part III, Section iv*), the object of which is to enable the learner to *think the scales* clearly, it is well to build every scale in the same way (see the 'Experiments' in *Lesson 2*); and in the *Second Scale Course* to have the mechanical part—the written work—done always in the same order: (a) the notes, (b) the writing of the scale-syllables under, (c) the marking of the little steps, (d) analysis and addition of the new sound, (e) the writing of the key-signature.

331. By repetition *in the same way* both the thinking and the doing become more rapid, and there is always enough difference every time to make thinking necessary. So in chord-building, by the formula for finding the dominant and subdominant chords (*Chord Lessons 3 and 4*) the chords are quickly and accurately found *in any key*. But repetition of the process is necessary—drill, let us call it—and it cannot become merely

mechanical, because in every key the constituents of the chord are different. The pupil has to think every time; but by repetition the brain-paths are traversed more easily and the thinking is more quickly done. A connected group of ideas is called up into consciousness at each repetition, their presentative activity is increased, and they are more closely connected with each other.

332. The formula in which a teacher—with the help of her pupils if possible—sums up the result of a lesson, if it is worth anything is worth memorizing. Hear Professor James on this. He says:

‘In every branch of study there are happily turned, concise, and handy formulas which in an incomparable way sum up results. The mind that can retain such formulas is in so far a superior mind, and the communication of them to the pupil ought always to be one of the teacher’s favourite tasks.’

He refers to the formulas and summaries in books, but his words apply to any summary that answers to his description. Make sure that your summary is short and clear and *adequate*; then let the pupils memorize it, and in review work expect it to be remembered accurately. Older pupils should summarize in their own words, but we cannot expect the younger children to give a summary that shall be ‘short and clear and adequate’; therefore their attempts at explanation should be reduced by the teacher to a form that will be to them an example of clear language and thus a preparation for self-expression later on. The danger lies in giving a formula too soon. First let the pupil get at the facts and their inter-relation;

test his grasp of a principle till you are sure of his power of applying it. Then give him a formula *as a reminder* by which the ideas it links together—a whole apperception mass—shall come into consciousness in an orderly manner.

333. Whenever the mind encounters something new it challenges it, tries to account for it. It seeks a solution of 'What is it?' in 'What is it like?' and will name the newly presented object according to its real or fancied resemblance to a known one. It struggles to apperceive, and may apperceive amiss.

334. One of H.M.'s Inspectors, Mr. Rooper, tells a story that illustrates this. He was one day listening to an object lesson given by a pupil-teacher to a class of young children. She chose as her subject a pot of ferns. 'Who can tell me what this is?' she began. But there was silence (we must conclude that it was a class of little city children, who had never seen ferns growing before). At last a little voice called out, 'It is a pot of green feathers!' And the young teacher, turning to the inspector, said, 'Poor little thing, she does not know any better.' She made no attempt to account for the child's answer, but Mr. Rooper set himself to think it out, and the result was an essay which he called 'A Study in Apperception,' and published under the title of 'The Pot of Green Feathers.'

335. So even when you present an object to a child's eyes you must not take for granted that he sees what you see. Far less may you take for granted that when you play a piece to him he

hears what you hear. His apperceptive hearing depends entirely on the number and kind of musical ideas he already possesses. It is important to remember this when playing to a mixed class of school pupils, else we may be deluded into thinking that applause from all means comprehension by all. Music is a pleasant noise to most people, and children will clap on the slightest provocation, but behind the ears that hear there are no two minds with the same stock of ideas. Some, from musical experience and good teaching, will be sensitive, discerning, apperceptive—*minds* that hear. Others will hear confusedly, however carefully you expound. And behind other ears will be minds that, to all intents and purposes, are stone deaf. We cannot alter those conditions; we must do our best, but we must be under no illusions.

336. 'Children can observe only what their apperception masses are prepared to act upon; to all else they are literally blind, deaf, callous.'—*Adams*.